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AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION: BOYS' AGRICULTURAL CLUBS

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The actual introduction of agricultural subjects into the public schools has developed along two lines, one indirect and informal, the other direct and formal. They may be regarded as two stages of one development, for experience seems to indicate that creating an interest informally by means of boys' agricultural clubs is often, if not always, the most successful method of introducing the study of agriculture into the schools of a community.

Indeed, in many places where formal instruction has failed boys' clubs have been a great success. This is well illustrated in Louisiana. In that state, although the teaching of agriculture has been required since 1898, it has not received much serious attention in the elementary schools. But boys' clubs are being organized in every parish in the state, one parish school boys' club, for example, enrolling during the present year 555 members. This form of agricultural instruction is extending rapidly over the entire country, and is becoming a very important extension work in education as well as in agriculture. It tends to ally itself more and more with the public schools, until finally some more or less formal instruction becomes a regular part of the school work.

Thus in Ohio the state superintendent of agricultural extension work writes that most boys' and girls' club activities are now conducted as a part of the school work and that agricultural clubs as such are becoming a thing of the past, so that no separate records or statistics are now generally kept in the state (118, p. 12).¹

Two good accounts of the agricultural club movement have been published by the United States Department of Agriculture,

¹ References by numbers are to the corresponding number in the bibliography at the end of this article, or in bibliographies following other articles of this series.

one tracing its development to 1904 (44), the other from 1904 to 1910 (118). The following discussion will therefore be confined chiefly to the present status of the movement with typical examples of successful work, and to the reaction of the agricultural clubs on rural education.

Various agencies have taken the initiative in starting this movement under particular local conditions, but the inspiration for state-wide activity in these lines has generally come from some individual or official source connected with the state department of education, the state agricultural college, or the United States Department of Agriculture. In the absence of such initiative the work has sometimes begun in the zeal and wisdom of some county officer or association, as the county superintendent of schools, the farmers' institute society, the county fair association, or teachers' association, the Grange organization, or the Young Men's Christian Association. Experience has shown that the work has always been most permanent and productive when it has resulted in a definite local organization, preferably under the leadership of the county school superintendent (118, p. 7).

Reference has already been made to the work of the state and college extension departments, of state departments of education, and of other agencies in the organization of these clubs (29, 32, 34, 44, 119).²

During the present year this work has been extended, and is becoming better organized. In 1909 there were clubs in twenty-eight states with a total membership of approximately 150,000. During the present year many new clubs have been formed, and the membership in many of those already organized has increased. An instance of the latter is found in the increase in membership of one club from 17 in 1909 to 555 in 1910. In the above estimate for 1909 several states that now have clubs are not included. For example, Kansas has one or more clubs in each county, with a total membership of more than 5,000. The eleven southern states that had a membership of about 13,000 in 1909 have this year nearly 50,000 enrolled. The total membership of 1910 for the entire country may conservatively be estimated at more than 300,000.

The most important recent development is that of the Boys' Corn Club work in the southern states. This work was under-

² This *Journal*, Vol. X, No. 6.

taken by representatives of the United States Bureau of Plant Industry through county superintendents of education four years ago. Three years ago it was extended in a few counties of the Gulf states where the boll weevil was damaging cotton crops. At the beginning of 1909 a systematic plan was undertaken to organize Boys' Corn Clubs in a few counties in each of the southern states. There were enrolled 12,400 boys. During 1910 in response to further demands the organizations have been extended into nearly 600 counties, with a total enrolment of 46,225 boys. Although no statistical summary of the work has been issued, a number of reports have been received by the department which show excellent work. In one county in Mississippi 48 boys averaged 92 bushels per acre; 20 boys in one county of South Carolina made 1,700 bushels of corn on 20 acres. Another club of 142 boys averaged 62 bushels to the acre, several going above 100, and two or three above 150 bushels.³

The Boys' Corn Club work is the Junior Department of the Government Demonstration Work now being carried on in all the southern states. The results of the boys' work have attracted the attention of the entire country. Considerable prominence was given to it by the public press in 1909, but much more to the results of 1910, particularly to the remarkable achievement of Jerry Moore of Winona, S.C., a boy not fifteen years old, who produced $228\frac{3}{4}$ bushels of corn on one acre of land, this being the second largest yield per acre in the history of corn production.⁴

The crowning event of the work of 1910 was a visit to Washington on December 12, 1910, of the prize winners from eleven southern states. They were awarded diplomas of merit by the Secretary of Agriculture, presented to the President of the United States, and personally conducted by O. B. Martin, assistant in charge of the Junior Demonstration Work, over the city of Washington, visiting all places of interest.

³ The above facts were furnished in a letter from O. B. Martin, government assistant in charge of Boys' Demonstration Work.

⁴ Results of 1909: *Youth's Companion*, April 10, 1910; Results of 1910: Associated Press account, *Chicago Record-Herald*, December 11 and 18, 1910.

The relation of this work to the schools is indicated by the following extracts from directions for organization and instruction sent out by the department:

Where this work is being introduced in a county, the county superintendent of education and teachers can reach the boys in all sections of the county more quickly and more effectively than any other agency. The superintendent can explain the plan to the teachers, and they can explain it to the boys and secure the names of all the boys who will agree to plant one acre of corn. . . . Just as soon as the names of all the boys are assembled in the office of the county superintendent of education, duplicate lists should be sent to Dr. S. A. Knapp, Washington, D.C., who has charge of the Farmers' Co-operative Demonstration Work. These boys will from time to time receive circulars of instruction and information in regard to preparation, fertilization, cultivation, seed selection, etc. These circulars furnish excellent subject-matter for discussion at a club meeting, or for a lesson in school. They lead to further study of farmers' bulletins and books. A boy will profit much from such lessons, discussions, and books, because he is making practical application of the principles taught. He learns scientific agriculture because he needs it, and not because it is scientific. . . . The object of the Boys' Demonstration Work is the same as that among men, namely, better methods of farming and greater yields at less cost. Many of the boys in the clubs who begin to study agriculture in this way will continue the study in agricultural colleges; others will continue such efforts on their farms, and all of them will make useful and more effective citizens.⁵

The organization of the clubs in various states differs somewhat in details, but in general there is a close co-operation between the state departments of education and the state agricultural college. A good example of a state organization is the Farm-Life Club Movement in Alabama:

The leading objects of the Farm-Life Club Movement are educational and for this reason it is our desire to make this movement have a close and vital connection with the work of the county superintendents of education, the teachers, and the schools of the state. There are many important educational problems in Alabama today, but the largest one is the question of better farming. In beginning the work in a county we first secure co-operation of the superintendent and through him interest the teachers. The work is discussed at a teachers' institute and later a letter is mailed requesting each teacher to interest the boys in his school and his community in this

⁵ From mimeograph directions sent out by O. B. Martin, assistant in charge of Boys' Demonstration Work, June 1, 1910.

work. The names of the boys are sent to the county superintendent by the teachers.

This work furnishes the greatest opportunity yet launched for the county superintendents and teachers to be of invaluable service to the people in arousing interest in better farming and in improved agriculture.

The ultimate purpose of the work is to aid the great movement for better farming all along the lines, and to encourage the boy to get an education in agriculture and to remain on the farm.

The work in Alabama has been in progress scarcely a year and the results are very encouraging indeed. At present the work has been started in about 17 counties in the state. There is a total of approximately 2,000 boys listed in the work. There have been raised locally among merchants, bankers, and other public-spirited people over \$2,000 in prizes. In addition to this the state fairs in Birmingham and Montgomery are offering a total of about \$500 for the boys in the corn clubs. After making these exhibits at the state fairs the best of these will be carried to the National Corn Show.

It has been my pleasure during the last month to hold boys' meetings in several counties and to visit a large number of individual acres of corn. The yield in a great many cases is very remarkable. For example, one boy's acre of corn will yield at least 65 bushels of corn, and in addition to the corn there will be enough snap beans and corn middles to pay all the expenses for making the corn, including rent of land and interest on investment. I quote below from a letter recently received from a gentleman who lives in a community where a club has been organized: "Some of the boys are going to make 75 and 85 bushels per acre, and some are going to make as much as 100 bushels." Another letter from a business man will give some idea as to how the business men regard the work: "I think the boys' corn club has worked wonders in the cultivation of corn in this state. I have never seen as much enthusiasm among the old farmers as now prevails, and I feel certain that the Boys' Corn Club is largely responsible for it."

At a meeting held in northern Alabama I asked some of the boys to give me an idea as to the outlook of their corn crop. One, in making a report of his work, said: "Every farmer in a radius of two miles of my acre has visited my corn and said, If you make 35 bushels of corn on this acre we are going to follow your method." Prospects were good for a yield of more than 50 bushels on this acre. The father of this boy said, "I have a special acre myself and do not propose to have my boy beat me raising corn."

This movement is not a question of adding new duties to the county superintendent and teachers without additional pay, but a question of opportunity and service. No movement has yet been projected where superintendents of education and teachers may be of greater service to the people than in the organization of the Farm-Life clubs. This plan also furnishes

the best method yet devised of bringing together in harmonious co-operation all the interests looking to better education and better farming. In this work the county superintendents, the teachers, the merchants, the newspapers, the State College of Agriculture, the State Department of Agriculture, and the State Department of Education can all work together for the common good.⁶

Another important phase of the agricultural-club idea is being developed by the Farmers' Institute specialist of the Office of Experiment Stations of the United States Department of Agriculture. It is known as Farmers' Institutes for Young People. The following statement in regard to these institutes will indicate the object and character of the work undertaken:

In order, therefore, that opportunity to become acquainted with agricultural operations may be given to those who have left the public school and from whose ranks the future farmers and their wives must be supplied, the farmers' institutes in several states have organized and are now conducting what is known as "institutes for young people." The majority of these are not institutes in the sense in which the work of the farmers' institute has come to be defined. They are in reality boys' and girls' clubs conducted in the same manner as those operated by the public schools. . . .

Because of the fundamental difficulty in securing teachers capable of giving vocational training and instruction in agriculture in the rural schools, and from the fact that after the scholars leave school no provision has been made for giving them the opportunity to receive such instruction, the farmers' institute has undertaken the training in agriculture of rural children after leaving school. In doing this it has found it necessary to drop from its system of instruction the purely educational feature and to devote itself strictly to giving vocational instruction. Such studies and practice, therefore, as the institute utilizes have in view the perfecting of the individual in his vocation. The institute system, therefore, partakes more nearly than any other of the trade-school method, and is intended for youths above 14 years of age. It will become the connecting link between the agricultural-club movement on the one hand and the regular farmers' institutes for adults on the other (120).

In 1909, 20 states and territories are reported to have held institutes for young people. This system seems to be the best organized in Indiana, where about one-third of the counties have such institutes with an enrolment of over 12,000. The young people's institutes are held at the same time as the farm-

⁶ From a letter written by L. N. Duncan, U.S. demonstrator for Alabama, and professor of school agriculture, Alabama State Agricultural College.

ers' institutes but in separate sessions. The public is interested as indicated by liberal contributions, one county appropriating in 1909 \$1,000 for this work.

The extension department of the Kansas State Agricultural College is just introducing a correspondence school in connection with its young people's extension work. The object of this is similar to that of the young people's institute, being designed to help boys and girls who have been compelled to leave school.

The boys' clubs of Kansas, whose work thus far has been almost wholly confined to corn contests, are now being organized on a somewhat different basis. The plan follows that of the Boy Scouts of America and the clubs are known as the "Rural-Life Scouts." Although just started, considerable interest is being shown in these clubs. The leaders are generally principals of village schools or pastors of village churches. In counties where there is a Y.M.C.A. secretary, the organizations are affiliated with the Y.M.C.A. work.

The county superintendent of education and his teachers have been an important factor in making boys' clubs a success, whether under the auspices of the Government Demonstration Work, state agricultural colleges, or state departments of education. The work in large units, state or sectional, is really made possible by successful work carried out by county superintendents of schools or teachers in the various parts of the country. It may be of interest at this point to give somewhat in detail a concrete example of how a county superintendent of education went about organizing successful boys' agricultural clubs in his own county.

The county superintendent of Delaware County, Iowa, began to organize boys' clubs six years ago, holding township meetings where the boys brought corn selected from their fathers' seed corn. The meetings were addressed by an expert, on "What Constitutes Good Seed Corn." This was accompanied by demonstrations from samples of poor and good ears. The corn brought by the boys was then judged and commented upon by the expert. The superintendent then distributed seed corn which he had bought for this purpose. The year following the boys came

together in a contest showing the results obtained from the corn distributed the year before. This work was continued through the next year, except that the boys selected their own seed corn from their fathers' corn. A short course in agriculture was held at Manchester, the county seat, where about sixty boys attended. The corn clubs continued to grow in interest from year to year until most of the boys were as good judges of corn as, or even better than, their fathers. Last year the work was varied by using oats instead of corn. The superintendent purchased forty bushels of Canadian oats, and distributed the seed among the boys of the county. At the close of the season a contest was held at which the results of the season's work were shown. The experiment was watched with much interest throughout the county, and the farmers were eager to purchase seed from the boys for their own farms. In one year the value of Canadian oats for Delaware County was demonstrated by the boys, and oat production in the county was greatly improved.

All this was extra school work, but the superintendent made good use of the interest thus aroused to help and improve the regular school work. Raising corn and oats became subjects of compositions, references to bulletins and books were used as reading lessons, and estimates of cost and yield furnished material for arithmetic. By means of printed instructions sent to teachers from time to time, the formal work of the schools became enlivened and strengthened by its practical application.

The work in Delaware County is a typical example of how the education of a county or township system may be redirected by means of boys' clubs. Springfield Township, Ohio (119), Keokuk (44) and Page (121) counties, Iowa, Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, Winnebago County, Illinois (122, 123), Wexford County, Michigan, and many other places might be mentioned where boys' agricultural clubs have not only been the means of improving school conditions but by their success have led to similar work being introduced in other places.

Although not connected in any way with the public schools, the work of W. B. Otwell, editor of the *Otwell's Farmer Boy*,

Carlinville, Ill., deserves special mention. Mr. Otwell is chiefly responsible for the beginning of the state-wide development of boys' corn clubs in Illinois, and had charge of their exhibit at the St. Louis Exposition, where 1,250 boys' exhibits received awards. By means of his paper he is interesting a large number of boys of the Middle West. He is conducting at present a corn contest in which 25,000 boys are competing.⁷ Another feature of his boys' club is an annual encampment for those who can attend, for the purpose of agricultural study.

In order to give description in sufficient detail, the foregoing discussion of boys' agricultural clubs has been limited to a few typical examples of what is now actually being accomplished. References have been made from time to time to the public interest in the clubs and to their influence upon the public schools.

It was the intention in preparation of this article to include a fuller discussion of the relation of this movement to rural education than space will now permit. Opinions have been gathered from a number of state superintendents, and from others interested in rural education as to the reaction of the agricultural club movement upon the rural schools. These opinions are well summed up in the following:

Keeps boys in school longer; gives teacher greater influence and power; convinces farmers that school people want to and can be useful to the farming interests, and tends to make the school the center of community life; stirs farmers to greater endeavor and to better methods of farming, and increases general interest in agriculture and returns.

Perhaps the most important contribution that these clubs are now making to agricultural education in the public schools is in the recognition by the patrons of the direct value in dollars and cents that such instruction has, a recognition which will lead to better support and interest of the community in the schools.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The facts of the text have been gathered chiefly from correspondence with those interested in boys' agricultural clubs in various parts of the country. Only references indicated by number in the text are included in the following list.

⁷ *Otwell's Farmer Boy*, Carlinville, Ill., December, 1910.

118. "Boys' and Girls' Agricultural Clubs," F. W. HOWE, U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Farmers' Bulletin No. 385* (1910), 23.

This bulletin contains history, plans, and recent development of these clubs under the following heads: Introductory Summary of Results; How Work Has Been Accomplished in Several States; Assistance Given by the Department of Agriculture; The Relation of Club Work to Rural Education; Suggestions for Organization; List of References; Statistics.

119. "Agricultural Clubs in Rural Schools," HOMER C. PRICE, *Ohio State University Bulletin*, Ser. 7, No. 10 (1904), 14.

The bulletin contains suggestions for organizing clubs in the rural schools of Ohio. These suggestions are the outgrowth of the previous year's experience of the first club formed in Ohio under the auspices of the students of the Agricultural Union. This bulletin is of special interest because it represents the beginning of organized effort to develop agricultural clubs in Ohio.

120. "Farmers' Institutes for Young People," JOHN HAMILTON, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Experiment Stations, *Circular No. 99* (1910), 40.

This circular calls attention to "lack of adequate means for giving vocational training in agriculture to young people in rural districts after they leave the public school and, before they enter upon their life occupations." Boys' and girls' clubs, farmers' institutes for young people, subjects for institute study, systematic course for contest work, boys' encampments, form of organization, season for meeting, states and territories in which young people's institutes are organized, model constitution for young people's institutes, order of topics for boys' institute, score cards for various products, are some of the subjects discussed.

121. *Boys' Agricultural Club Bulletin*, JESSIE FIELD, Office of County Superintendent of Schools, Clarinda, Iowa (1909), 14.

This bulletin gives an account of the boys' club of Page County, Iowa, including summary of results of 1908 and plans for 1909.

122. *The Winnebagoes*, O. J. KERN, Office of County Superintendent of Schools, Rockford, Ill. (1903). Pp. 64.

This is a report of the Winnebago County (Ill.) schools, with suggestions for their improvement. One chapter (pp. 39-49) is devoted to boys' and girls' clubs. An account is given of the Boys' Experimental Club organized in 1902. This was one of the first boys' agricultural clubs organized in the United States.

123. *Among Country Schools*, O. J. KERN, New York: Ginn & Co. (1906). Pp. 366.

This is one of the best contributions to rural education that has been written. One chapter is devoted to a Boys' Experiment Club (pp. 129-57).